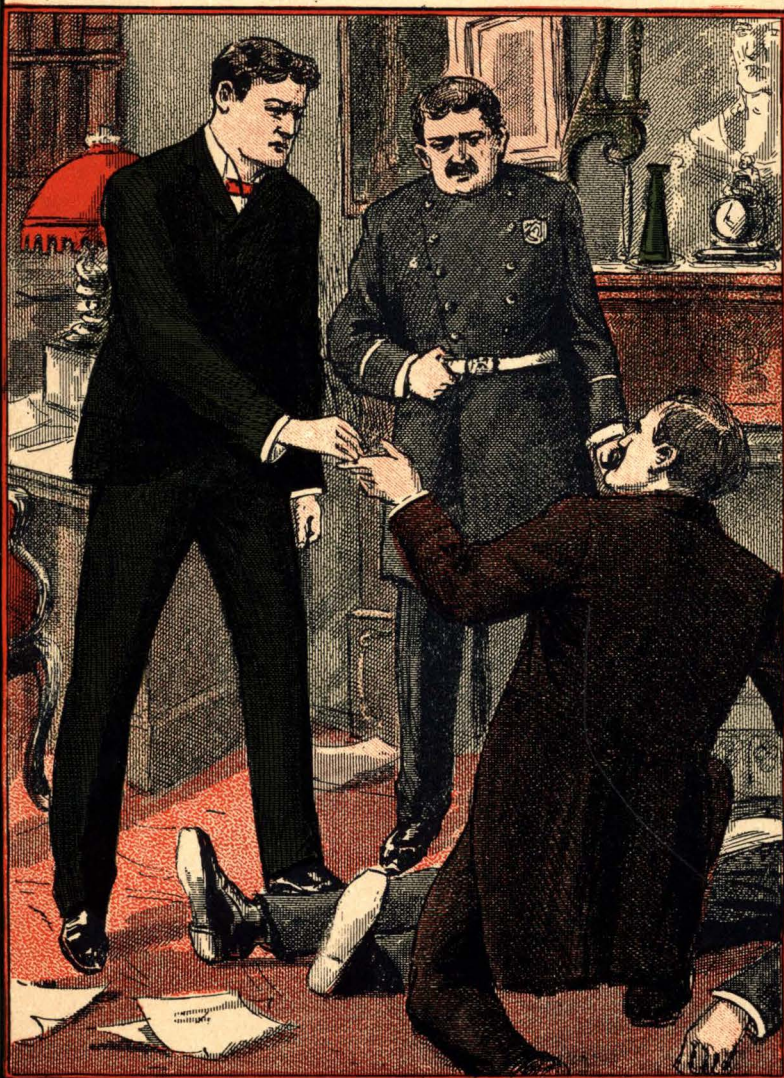


# SHIELD WEEKLY

TRUE DETECTIVE STORIES • STRANGER THAN FICTION

## SHERIDAN KEENE, DETECTIVE or The Chief Inspector's Best Man BY ALDEN F. BRADSHAW





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**TRUE DETECTIVE STORIES • STRANGER THAN FICTION**

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CHIEF INSPECTOR WATTS.



# SHERIDAN KEENE, DETECTIVE;

OR,

## The Chief Inspector's Best Man.

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By ALDEN F. BRADSHAW.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### THE MORNING'S NEWS.

"If you please, sir, I wish to find Chief Inspector Watts."

"I am Chief Inspector Watts, young man."

And the efficient head and front of the Boston detective service, the Inspector of Police, gravely turned and bent his searching gaze upon the face of his caller.

The caller saw before him an imposing figure, combining portliness, dignity and physical strength; a refined, intelligent face, forceful and grave, with keen and penetrating blue eyes; the bearing of a gentleman and a man calmly conscious of his great power.

The visitor was an aristocratic youth of nineteen or twenty years, tastefully clad, and, by his pale face and tearful eyes, evidently seriously distressed.

"Thank Heaven I find you, sir," he cried, in tremulous tones; "I feared I was too early."

It then was about eight o'clock, on a clear, cool morning in the late fall, and the scene

was the clerk's office in that part of the Headquarters building occupied by the rooms of the Inspectors of Police.

Quick to read men's faces, something in that of his visitor's led Chief Inspector Watts to conduct him through the adjoining corridor and into his private office.

This is a large, square room, well lighted by two windows fronting on Pemberton Square.

Carpet and rugs cover the floor. Nearly in the middle of the room is a large rolltop desk, on which the accumulation of letters, documents and papers indicates the enormous detail involved in the work of this busy Chief.

Fronting the desk is a tall cabinet, containing a classified history of thousands of noted crime cases, the archives, as it were, of Vice and Crime.

Against the inner wall and opposite the windows is a similar cabinet. It is lettered in gilt, "Bertillon System of Measurement and Photographs." It has numerous small drawers. These contain the descriptive features of



a criminal, through a process of measurement, with descriptive information, and any peculiar physical marks. It makes a picture which physical dissolution only can entirely destroy.

Such was the general appearance of the Chief's private office, into which he had led young Ralph Barnard.

"Well, sir, having found me, what do you want?" he asked, with a commanding air habitual to him, and irresistibly impressive.

"Will you come out to my home at once, sir?"

"What is wrong at your home?"

"A crime has been committed! My father has been murdered!"

"Murdered!"

Chief Watts echoed the startling word without a change in countenance or manner. He is not a man to betray his feelings, however disturbed or excited. Likewise disregarding the stranger's emotion, he asked quietly:

"What's your name, young man?"

"Ralph Barnard."

"Who is your father?"

"Mr. Joseph Barnard."

"Not the attorney?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is it possible—murdered! How did you know that?"

"The evidence speaks for itself," Ralph replied, chokingly. "We found his body this morning on the——"

"Wait! I will go with you. I will hear the particulars on the way. We will take a cab at once! There is one at the door."

Quickly slipping into a light top-coat, Chief Inspector Watts briskly led young

Barnard through the corridor and back to the clerks' office.

There was just the shadow of a change now observable in this noted Chief and his bearing—a more decisive step, a growing fire in the depths of his keen eyes, and a closer compression of his firm lips. It was as if the bare possibility of the startling crime reported had suddenly spurred to action the indomitable will and subtle forces which have earned him worthy distinction among the ablest men of his vocation.

"Garrett, is Inspector Keene about here this morning?" he demanded, briskly, of a young clerk at the desk.

"I think so, Chief!" was the quick reply.

"I think he's in the men's room."

"Send him here!"

"I will take one of my detectives along with me," added the Chief, as the clerk sped through the corridor to a rear room allotted for general use to the subordinate inspectors. "Though the case proves to be even as serious as your disclosure implies, I am not sure I can give it my entire attention. Here is Detective Keene, now."

"They were joined, as he spoke, by a young man in the twenties, as clean cut of features as an itaglio, yet with a countenance as frank, fresh and prepossessing as can be imagined. Though of slight build and quite tall, his figure combined suppleness and grace with the strength of an athlete; while his every motion, the fire of his clear blue eyes, the ring of his pleasant voice, were at once suggestive of a lively, energetic spirit, well held in check by a discriminating mind.

"Good-morning, Chief!" he at once said, courteously.



"Good-morning, Keene! I want you to go with me. Come, young man!"

And Chief Inspector Watts, closely followed by the others, briskly ascended the short stairs leading up from the basement offices, and out into the sunshine of Pemberton Square.

A carriage stood at the curbing.

"Get in, Mr. Barnard," commanded the Chief; then, aside to the young detective at his elbow: "He reports that his father, Joseph Barnard, the lawyer, has been murdered. I'm very busy just now, and may assign the investigation to you."

"Very well, Chief!" Detective Keene quickly nodded. "I will do my best, yet would like the benefit of your discernment and experience if the case proves blind."

"Surely, Shed! And I will look it over with you to start with. Get in. What's your street and number, Mr. Barnard?"

"I live in Riverlawn Park, sir, on the Charles. The house is the only one on the right, except that of Mr. Slocum, the banker. If you drive out by the way of the——"

"Sure, Chief, I know the place!" put in the cabbie. "It's Lawyer Barnard's."

"Good for you, Patsey! Get out there lively."

And Chief Inspector Watts entered the carriage, banging the door behind him, and took the seat opposite his two companions.

That he knew Lawyer Barnard well partly accounts for the Chief's immediate and personal action in the matter. He knew him as a member of the Suffolk bar, a man of eminence in his profession, and of wealth and influence in the community. That he had

made an enemy sufficiently vengeful to have taken his life seemed hardly credible.

"Now, young man, let's have the whole story," Chief Watts commanded, sharply, as the vehicle whirled away through Pemberton Square and under the frowning walls of the imposing new court house. "What do you know of the circumstances?"

"I know only that my father is dead, sir; that we found his body on the library floor this morning. He had been shot through the heart, and the appearances of the room indicate——"

"I'll judge of the appearances myself, if you please! At what time was the body found?"

"About seven o'clock."

"By whom?"

"One of the servant girls."

"Under what circumstances?"

"She discovered that the gas was still burning in the library, and opened the door to learn why it had been left so."

"If the door was closed, how did she learn that the gas had not been extinguished?"

"She had been out of doors, she states, and saw the reflection of the light on the drawn curtains of the library windows."

"Ah, I see!"

"She is a trustworthy girl, sir!"

"I didn't imply the contrary!" said Chief Inspector Watts, shortly. "Was your father at home all of last evening?"

"I think so, sir."

"Don't you know?"

"Not positively, sir. The servants were both out until after eleven o'clock. Aside from my father, our family consists only of my brother Frank, my cousin Sybil Howard,



and myself. We three were at a local concert, and did not return home until late, about eleven, I think."

"Then, so far as you know, your father was alone in the house most of the evening?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did none of you see or speak with him on returning home?"

"No, sir, none of us. My cousin Sybil was escorted home by George Slocum, the son of the banker, and she states that she went right to bed. Frank and I came in a little later, and also retired. I observed then that a light was burning in the library; but that was nothing unusual, as my father frequently worked there until late at night."

"Do any of you know if he had had callers, or expected any?"

"No, sir; he said nothing to that effect while at dinner."

"At about what hour was your father left alone in the house?"

"About half-past seven, sir. I saw and spoke with him just before starting for the concert."

"Were you the last to leave the house?"

"Yes, sir; though I left in company with my brother Frank and cousin Sybil."

"Is the latter a young lady?"

"She is twenty, sir, and has lived with us since childhood."

"Parents dead?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where was your father and what was he doing, when you last saw him?"

"He sat in the library. He appeared to be engaged over some documents and papers on the table at which he was seated."

"Did you say he was accustomed to working there evenings?"

"Yes, sir. In fact, what we call the library is rather a room which he used for a home office. He frequently had clients call at the house, sir. To me there seems to be but one solution of the awful tragedy," added Ralph, in tones shaken with filial grief. "Some person must have entered the house after our departure and shot my father dead. The cowardly deed could not possibly have been committed after our return."

"You imply that the report of the weapon would have been heard?"

"Precisely, sir! A revolver could not have been discharged unheard during our presence in the house."

To this the Chief made no reply. The remark was reasonable. And though not much given to anticipating difficulties, he knew that the case already appeared involved in mystery.

The younger detective, Sheridan Keene, sat a silent listener to the Chief's fusillade of questions, and young Barnard's ready answers. He lost the significance of none, and fully appreciated Chief Watt's ability to cover all the ground.

Between these two men existed a rather stronger affection than that of mere professional esteem. The one owed to the other some of the noteworthy success which was already winning him distinction in his vocation; and, with his habitually keen discernment, Chief Watts very soon had discovered that, in the young man now some months his subordinate, he had secured an officer of more than ordinary acumen and acquirements.

Nor were these attributes of Keene the re-



sults of accident. In early life he had determined the calling he would adopt when a man, and had trained himself accordingly.

Naturally endowed with an observing eye, an analytical mind, and a faculty quick to detect and adjust obscure relations, he further had prepared himself for the aim in view by tireless study, not **only of the languages**, chemistry, chirography, and the practical methods of the most successful votaries of the detective art; but also Lavater's science of physiognomy, until the human face had become to him a more reliable index of character than can, without some knowledge of the science, even be imagined.

It was not strange, therefore, that Chief Watts had observed in him a young officer of unusual promise; and found in him one to whose cleverness and judgment he could occasionally appeal. And it had been noticed of late that some of the most mysterious cases coming under the investigation of the Inspectors of Police had been assigned by him to young Detective Keene.

And the Barnard affair proved to be one of this nature.

"Did you at once come in search of me on discovering the fatality?" the Chief demanded, after quite a period of silent consideration.

"Very soon after, sir," Ralph explained. "I first sent for our family physician, Dr. Cushman."

"Anything more?"

"I sent a messenger to notify our local police captain, sir."

"His name is Mason, is it not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Had he reached your home when you left?"

"No, sir."

"I hope he may be delayed till after my arrival. I want no person disturbing things."

"I left instructions that nothing should be disturbed till you came!" Ralph eagerly exclaimed.

"Ah, indeed! That was very thoughtful," nodded the Chief, with a curious lighting of his austere eyes.

Then he leaned forth from the carriage window, crying sharply:

"Driver!"

"Aye, sor!"

"Give your horses the whip! What's that ahead of us, another hack?"

"Devil a hack, sor! It's a cab!"

They already were nearing Riverlawn Park. A suspicion flashed to the Chief's mind. This cab might contain the head of the local police, Captain Mason, whose investigation of the case he preferred to anticipate. It was throwing up a great cloud of dust behind, some of which found its way to the Chief's throat and choked him. He coughed, and shouted violently:

"Can't you overtake and pass it?"

"Bedad! I can if the spalpeen of a driver'll drive slower!" Patsey answered dryly. "Sure he's not after wanting to be passed, and that's plain enough!"

"Whip up your horses!" commanded Chief Watts, sternly.

Thus admonished, the Irishman urged his animals on till they broke into a run.

They had left the heart of the city far behind, and had reached those distant outskirts where the imposing dwellings are iso-



lated, with broad and secluded grounds between.

Here a belt of woodland bordered the river, the waters of which could be seen glistening in the distance, and on the bank of which stood the palatial dwellings of both Philip Slocum, the millionaire banker, and of Lawyer Joseph Barnard, the victim of the previous night's fatality.

The approaching vehicles now swung round a curve of the shadowy road, and immediately beyond was the entrance to the Barnard estate.

In a moment both vehicles were approaching the broad gateway.

But the hack containing Chief Inspector Watts was now in advance.

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## CHAPTER II.

### STARTLING EVIDENCE.

Near the gateway was quite a gathering of morbidly curious people, drawn there by the startling news which now had begun to spread. They were prevented from entering the grounds by a local police officer stationed at the gate, and their vacillating interest quickly turned towards the two vehicles and the persons who sprang from the first to arrive.

"That's Watts! That's the Chief Inspector!" excitedly whispered one knowing fellow to a stranger at his elbow.

"Is it?"

"Sure thing! You can gamble I know him! And you don't want to cut loose in the wrong direction and have him looking for you!" grinned this informant, significantly. "It's a good safe bet that he'll land you!"

"Who's the man with the alpine hat and the sharp eyes?"

"I'm not sure, but I think that is Detective Keene."

"He's a mighty shrewd-looking duck!"

"Humph! Don't you make any mistake about that, neighbor!"

Naturally none of the trite encomiums reached the ears of the arriving officers, and Chief Inspector Watts, on springing down from his carriage, swung round and flashed a quick glance at the occupant of the cab. He rarely shoots very wide of the mark—the man at that moment alighting, a large, solid man in the uniform of a Police Captain, was the person the Chief had expected.

Whatever he may have thought about the hack which had passed him, he was greeted with a suavity not to be resisted.

"Oh, good-morning, Captain Mason!" said the Chief, cordially. "Glad to see you! Shake hands with Inspector Keene. Sorry to hear such bad news from out here."

"It reached you quite quickly, Chief Watts," was the reply, with a curious smile, as Captain Mason responded to the greeting and introduction.

"Yes," quietly assented the Chief. "Young Barnard reported the case to me at once. His information indicates a rather mysterious crime, and I decided to run out here in person."

"Glad you are here," he added. "Suppose we look over the evidence together."

"With pleasure, of course!" was Captain Mason's rather anomalous answer, in the light of the very serious nature of their mission.

The crowd stared after the several men,



who, accompanied by Ralph Barnard, now entered the gate. The patrolman on sentry duty touched his helmet and said modestly:

"Good-morning, Chief."

"Good-morning, officer," bowed Chief Watts, with grave, effective austerity, which instantly commands obedience and respect.

"This way, gentlemen," said Ralph, soberly.

The house stood a hundred yards from the street. It was surrounded by a great park of elms and beeches, with part of the woodland on the north. On all sides was the evidence of wealth and refinement, and the dwelling itself was a fine old colonial structure of wood, with Corinthian columns and broad verandas.

The detectives were met at the door, and ushered into the dim and sumptuous hall, by Ralph's brother Frank, and by Dr. Cushman.

But there was no sign of the one and only woman of the family, the niece of the dead man—the girl named Sybil Howard.

"What has been done here?" asked Chief Watts, immediately after introductions.

"But little, sir," the physician replied. "I have merely viewed the body. We have been waiting your arrival."

"Has anything been disturbed?"

"Nothing at all, sir."

"Very good!" the Chief said, approvingly, laying off his top-coat. "Show me to the library. None but you, doctor, and these officers, may accompany me."

With which peremptory directions the four men approached the library till they stood on the threshold of the fatal room, the Chief and Sheridan Keene in advance.

"Wait here!" commanded the former, with a sudden slight change of voice.

A shocking and grewsome scene had met their sober gaze.

The curtains at the windows still were drawn. The silent room was dim. It was like an appalling picture done in half-tone.

In one corner stood a small desk, closed and locked. A bookcase, with glass doors, occupied one side of the room. Against the wall between the two windows was a heavy mahogany table, square, the broad swinging leaf of which was turned down. The table had no cloth upon it, but was covered by endless papers, documents and writing materials. With these was a box of loose tobacco, some of which had been spilled, and left carelessly lying amid the disordered papers.

So much for the table.

The floor had no carpet, but was covered with a large square rug. On this was scattered many documents and papers, which evidently had fallen from the table. Some of these were considerably burned and blackened. Near by lay a large French clay pipe, the stem of which was broken. And quite close to the door lay an ominous-looking revolver, evidently that with which the crime had been committed.

It has been necessary to present these details, yet the first object to claim the gaze of all was the victim of the dreadful tragedy.

There upon the rug, face down, and some two or three feet from the table, with arms outstretched and his life-blood in a red pool under and about him, lay all that was mortal of the noted lawyer, Joseph Barnard, cold and still in death.



"Raise those curtains, Tom!" commanded the Chief, shortly.

Detective Keene tip-toed across the room and obeyed.

A flood of clear daylight accentuated the dismal details.

"Now, doctor, you first," said the Chief, closing the library door. "How long has this man been dead?"

There was something horribly business-like in his way, and in the celerity with which he proceeded; but thus only can justice be rendered, and Chief Inspector Watts was the man of all men for such an occasion as this.

Dr. Cushman came forward and bent above the motionless figure on the floor.

"Not far from ten hours, I should say," he presently replied. "Surely since last evening."

"Can you examine the wound?"

"By turning the body over."

"Do so! Now, what do you find?"

"The bullet entered just below the breast bone, and passed through the heart. The wound was instantly fatal, sir."

"Could it have been self-inflicted?"

The physician said, decidedly:

"No, sir!"

"Explain why."

"The weapon could not have been held and fired to have caused such a wound, without smoking if not burning the shirt front."

"Are there no indications of that?"

"None whatever. Furthermore, it would have been wholly unnatural to so have held a weapon."

"You think, then, that the man was shot by some other person?"

"I certainly do!"

"We will assume that to be the fact, doctor. Where, then, judging from the direction taken by the ball and the position in which the body was discovered, was the assassin probably standing when the shot was fired?"

Dr. Cushman drew a pliable rubber probe from his pocket, and for several minutes continued his operations over the dead man. Presently he looked up and gravely answered:

"I should say about where you are standing, Chief Watts."

"Certainly between Lawyer Barnard and the library door?"

"I would stake my reputation upon that."

"Do you find any indications of a struggle or conflict prior to the firing of the shot?"

"I find a bruise on the back of the fingers of the right hand, and an abrasion over the knuckles. Moreover, the stone is missing from a gold ring on the lawyer's finger!"

"Here, Chief, is the stone!"

The interruption came from Detective Keene, whose intent gaze had lost none of the details of the scene. He stepped forward while speaking, and picked up from the rug beneath the table a large diamond, the glitter of which had caught his eye.

Chief Inspector Watts took the stone between his thumb and finger, and, bending above the ghastly form on the floor, applied the jewel to the damaged setting.

"It fits the ring exactly!" he said, quietly. "This evidently was broken by a violent blow."

"A blow given his assailant, of course!" cried Captain Mason, with some excitement.

"Very possibly."



"Positively, I should say, Chief! Surely the damaged ring and the bruised knuckles are evidence that he struck his assailant before the shot was fired."

"I think so, too," gravely observed the physician.

But Chief Watts, calm and imposing in his austere gravity, expressed no further opinion.

"Do you find any other evidence on the body, doctor?" he demanded.

"I do not, sir. Perhaps the autopsy of the medical examiner will reveal something more."

"I will excuse you then, if you have other engagements?"

"I am in no haste, sir."

And the physician remained.

The Chief stooped and took up the broken pipe from the floor.

"Was Barnard addicted to smoking, doctor, do you know?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. He was an inveterate smoker."

"I find that he had freshly filled his pipe, but evidently was assaulted before he had time to light it, since none of the tobacco is burned."

"He must have had it in his left hand, and dropped it when shot!" Captain Mason eagerly suggested.

"Very likely."

"These papers scattered over the floor further indicate a struggle, in which they must have been swept from the table," added Mason.

"Do you observe that some of them are partly burned, Inspector Watts?" demanded the physician.

"Yes."

"How do you account for that, sir?"

The Chief drew himself up and in a curiously moderate way expressed an opinion.

"I account for it thus, if this be indeed a case of murder," he said, gravely. "With a view to covering his crime the assassin turned incendiary also. He set fire to the papers, which appear to be deeds, writs and documents of some kind; and yonder on the floor is the burnt match which he used. That this attempt was made in great haste and excitement, however, there can be no doubt; for the work was ineffectively done, and the fire burned itself out in the papers only."

"The rug is slightly burned."

"So I see."

"I will wager that is the solution, Chief!" exclaimed the physician, admiringly. "Some man certainly was here last evening, and departed in great haste after having committed the crime—of that there can be no doubt!"

"But the question still remains to be answered—Who was the man?"

"Or woman!" said Sheridan Keene to himself.

"What are the habits of the two sons of the lawyer? Do you know, doctor?" the Chief next inquired.

"Their habits are exemplary!" was the quick reply. "Ralph is employed in his father's law office. Frank is still in college. I would as quickly suspect one of my own blood as either of the Barnard boys!"

"I am told by one of them that, so far as he knows, his father expected to be at home alone all of last evening."

"So I understand, sir. But that he was not alone here is now lamentably apparent."

Like one moved by a sudden impulse, the



Chief now crossed the room and laid his hand on Detective Keene's shoulder.

"A word with you, Keene," he said, softly. "I want you, while I am examining these documents on the floor and table, which may give some hint concerning the visitor who may have been expected here last night, to take a turn outside, with an eye for any suspicious circumstances. Examine the library windows, and the ground beneath them, as well as any other points at which an entrance may have been secretly effected. If you find anything out of the way, report it to me later."

"I will investigate at once," whispered Sheridan. "And I'll see you before you leave for town."

"Do so!" nodded the Chief, approvingly.

Then he turned back to the table and the disordered documents thereupon; while Detective Keene slipped quietly from the room, closing the door after him.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### THE EAVESDROPPER.

There was a special reason why Detective Keene closed the library door behind him—an occasion observed only by himself.

The library opened into a long hall. On the opposite side were the parlors, a large double room divided by a rich portière. The light from one of the windows of the rear parlor shone into the hall through the rear parlor door, and towards the door of the library. Before leaving the library Detective Keene noticed that though the library door was closed, the reflection of the outer light could be seen on the polished threshold beneath it, a mere thread of light close to the

floor. With a sudden startling suspicion as he crossed the library to emerge, Keene, by mere chance, detected a swift change in the thread of light.

It suddenly brightened. It was as if his approaching step had been heard, and as if some startled person, who stood partly in the rays from the rear parlor, had hurriedly moved away.

"An eavesdropper!" instantly decided Keene, who never lost the significance of such a circumstance. "The mystery widens!"

Yet he made no disclosure.

If the solution of this mysterious affair was to devolve upon him, with the assistance of Chief Inspector Watts, there would come a better time for making a report to his superior than in the presence of Police Captain Mason, whose officious interest might yet in some way embarrass them. The long hall was vacant when Detective Keene emerged. Not a sign of the spy. Whoever he was, he had vanished as if into thin air.

Now, feeling that he himself might be watched, he made no betrayal of his suspicious discovery. Approaching the front door, which was a screen door, the main one standing open, he encountered a girl just entering, evidently one of the servants.

"Good-morning," he said, quietly.

"Good-morning, sir," said the girl, with a slight courtesy.

"I presume Ralph and his brother are engaged just now."

"Yes, sir; they are. They are in Mr. Ralph's room up stairs, sir; writing letters telling friends of the sad death, sir. Do you want them?"



"Oh, no," said Sheridan, indifferently. "I'm going presently."

"Yes, sir."

And the servant, removing her hat as she went, ascended the hall stairs.

Sheridan decided that the eavesdropper was neither of the young men. But the identity of the spy was important. He resolved to meet cunning with cunning.

Apparently without special aim, he passed out of doors and sauntered round the veranda, on which the sound of his feet could be heard plainly from within.

At the end of five minutes, he tip-toed back to the front door, hoping that his absence would encourage the spy to return. His hope was rewarded, but his success only partial for the moment. For the sun had cast his shadow upon the screen door before he could reach it and look within.

But he caught, like a flash of light, the flutter of white skirts vanishing into the rear parlor. The spy had again retreated from the library door.

"A woman!" muttered Sheridan, with a thrill of surprise. "And I reckon I now can corner her!"

He entered the hall again, moving quietly but quickly, and then slipped into the main parlor and towards the portière partly concealing the rear room. As he suspected would be the case, the spy was approaching from the opposite direction, apparently anxious to evade observation.

But they met on the very threshold between the two rooms.

"Oh, mercy! how you startled me!"

The exclamation, little more than a quick,

sharp whisper, broke involuntarily from the woman.

Yet she was young, not more than twenty; and Keene, though his nerves were usually as flexible as steel, fairly recoiled for an instant. For never in his life had he looked on such a startling type of feminine beauty.

She was perfectly formed, and tastefully clad in a dark lace morning dress, which accentuated her clear pink and white complexion; while her regular features, her pretty mouth, her large deep blue eyes and wealth of fleecy auburn hair, combined to present a countenance viewed but once in a lifetime.

"Startled you, eh!" gasped Keene, as he caught his breath, and his self-possession as well.

"Greatly, sir!"

And a quick smile, manifestly forced, swept to the girl's face. But she, too, had caught herself, Keene decided, and was aiming to avert possible suspicion.

"Sorry, I'm sure," said he. "Are you one of the servants?"

"No, sir, I am not! Do I look like a servant, sir?"

"Well, frankly, you do not."

"Nor am I," was the haughty rejoinder. "I am Sybil Howard, one of the family here."

"And my name is Keene," said Sheridan, shortly. "I'm a detective, and engaged in looking into this affair."

The light in Sybil's searching eyes intensified. Not for an instant as yet had they left those of the detective, at whose frank and rather curt avowal she fell to trembling visibly, with breast heaving, despite her efforts to conceal her perturbation.

"A detective!" she echoed, faintly.



"Precisely," nodded Keene, who was steadily taking her measure. "But I am striving only to serve justice, Miss Howard, and the innocent need never fear."

"No, surely not!" assented Sybil, and her smile returned. "If you please I will pass through the parlor and go upstairs to my room."

The request was necessary, for Keene was purposely remaining directly in front of her.

"Before you go, Miss Howard, tell me what you were doing out yonder!" he said, quietly, with a toss of his head towards the hall.

Again she shrank—and again caught herself by sheer force of will. But now all the color was gone from her lovely cheeks, and only the forceful pressure of her bloodless lips prevented their quivering.

"Out where?" she equivocated, in a short, sharp whisper.

"Out in the hall."

"I wasn't doing anything out in the hall!"

"Oh, yes, you were!" Keene firmly persisted. "Tell me what—and for what reason!"

"How dare you speak so to me! You are impertinent! I am not compelled to answer you!" protested Sybil, with eyes betraying the possession of a latent power that surprised even her opposer.

"Pardon, but you may be compelled, Miss Howard," said Keene, gently.

"Let me pass!"

"Not yet, please."

"You are insolent! You are——"

"I am firm, rather!" said Keene, more sternly. "I am a detective, here upon a se-

rious duty, and I mean what I say. Tell me what you were doing in the hall!"

"I am going to my room, sir!"

With sudden impulsive desperation she now made an effort to pass him, but the detective seized either of her fair wrists and gently, yet firmly, detained her. He found that her pulse was beating furiously, which betrayed at once the wild riot of her heart.

"Listen to me, Miss Howard!" he now commanded, in a low, severe way, which few would care to have disregarded, "I want an answer to my question. Either that, or it may be necessary for me to arrest you."

She did not cry out at this threat. The will of the girl seemed superior even to her present desperate situation. But the look on her hueless face became that of superlative hate and resentment.

She drew back a little, sweeping aside her skirts with her dainty foot, and without further efforts to release herself from the hands of the detective she said with caustic bitterness, meeting him eye to eye:

"I cannot hope to cope with you, sir, when it comes to a trial of brute strength! You are a very muscular man! But I am your superior in all other worthy attributes, I will wager!"

"Possibly!" said Keene, dryly. "Even your——"

"Oh, I don't fear that you will arrest me!" interrupted Sybil, with her agitation now displaced by an icy mingling of composure and contempt. "There will be no need of that. Release me, if you please! I will answer your question."

"Do so," said Keene, instantly releasing her hands.



And had the situation been less serious, and his suspicions less pronounced, he could have admired her for her rare womanly power and superb beauty.

"Pardon—what was the question?" she now demanded, with a sneer.

"I asked what you were doing in the hall, Miss Howard."

"I was listening at the library door!"

"Playing the eavesdropper?"

"Precisely!"

"With what object?"

"Your question has become two questions, sir!"

"Answer question number two, then!" cried Keene, with ominous severity.

Sybil shrugged her shoulders disdainfully.

"I suppose I shall be compelled as before if I decline," she retorted, with a curling of her red lips. "Yet only a most foolish fellow would ask such a question."

"I am that foolish fellow, then," said Keene, with unabated firmness. "Why were you listening at the library door?"

"Goodness gracious, sir, my uncle had been murdered!" Sybil now said, forcibly. "Is it strange that I should feel an interest in what is to follow? Do I not hope his death may be avenged? Am I not a woman? Did you ever know a woman without a woman's share of curiosity? Attribute my conduct to that, if you like—or to anything else you please! For this is all the answer you will receive from me, Mr. Presumptuous Detective—and that's final!"

A faint, doubtful smile relaxed the severity of Sheridan Keene's eyes and mouth. He guessed the truth—that the girl had now

overcome her first feelings of dismay and alarm, and had taken a position she was resolved to maintain. In this case, he felt there was nothing to be gained from her then and there.

In reply to her defiant words, he said simply:

"You think so, do you?"

"I know so, sir! May I now go to my room?"

"If you wish—yes!"

He bowed profoundly as she swept by him, but his crafty gaze never left her splendid face.

And startling him again, even as she was evidently startled anew, he saw the light in her frowning eyes suddenly change, and that deathly pale—dispel again the flush but briefly risen to her velvety cheeks.

He glanced through a window toward which she necessarily had turned.

A young man, just emerged from the thicker woodland beyond the cleared park, was hurrying towards the house. Sybil Howard also had observed him, giving her that sudden start, Detective Keene had no doubt.

He wheeled sharply on his heel and returned to the library, purposely closing the door somewhat noisily.

As he had intended, the girl thought herself well rid of him.

An expression of triumph instantly lighted her face.

But the cunning of Detective Keene was greater far than she dreamed.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### A CONVERSATION OVERHEARD.

Detective Keene found Chief Inspector Watts and his companions still examining



the documents and papers which strewed the table in the fatal room. His absence had not covered more than eight or ten minutes, and his purpose in returning had been solely to disarm Sybil Howard of suspicion as to his immediate movements.

That the approach of the person she had seen was of serious significance, she herself had inadvertently betrayed, and Detective Keene realized that a speedy and unsuspected espionage upon what followed their meeting was now of paramount importance.

He covered his re-entrance to the library by saying quietly:

"I've found nothing as yet, Chief. I think I'll take a turn about the grounds."

The Chief looked up, vaguely wondering that he had come at all with such insignificant matter.

"Very well!" he growled, curtly.

Evidently his own discoveries were not wholly to his liking.

Turning quickly, Keene softly opened the door and regained the hall. A tapping on the pane of a window caught his ear. It appeared to come from the direction of the front parlor.

With the silence and celerity of a cat, Keene returned to the rear room, stealing to the broad doorway between the two, and concealing himself between the wall and the voluminous folds of the heavy portière.

It was as he had suspected—Sybil Howard was tapping on the front window to attract the approaching man.

With every nerve on the *qui vive* Detective Keene awaited the outcome.

Presently the stranger's tread sounded on the veranda stairs. Then the screen door

was opened, and he quickly appeared at the drawing-room entrance.

"Good heavens!" thought Keene, the instant he heard his voice. "It is George Slocum!"

Sybil, pale and excited, met him almost on the threshold, a grave, handsome young man of two and twenty.

"My dear Sybil!" he exclaimed. "Is this dreadful news true? Has your uncle indeed——"

But there she cut short his grieved and sympathetic words, impulsively seizing his arm and drawing him into the room.

"Hush!" she whispered, vehemently, with a swift glance about. "First of all, George, hear me!"

"What do you mean?" he gasped, amazedly.

She replied with a caution, haste and impressive significance that combined to turn her hearer's startled amazement to manifest horror and dismay.

"Can't you guess what I mean?" she whispered wildly. "Have you forgotten last night? I've been watching madly for you all the morning, lest you should come here with some betrayal. Yet I dared not send you word—I dared not! But I have revealed nothing! Nothing at all! Nor will I—nor will I!"

"Merciful heavens!" gasped Slocum. "You do not think that——"

"Hush! Not too loud! I do not think at all—I know!"

"Sybil——"

"This—oh, George, dear, this is now a matter of life and death! Can't you see that it is?"



"You alarm me!"

"Oh, you will! You will when you know all the terrible circumstances! Yes, my uncle was murdered last evening! Everything points to the fact that some person——"

"But not whom you would have me think!" Slocum interrupted, in horrified accents. "My God! I could not believe him guilty of——"

But the excited girl could not suffer his demurring.

"It don't matter whether he is guilty or not!" she argued, with feverish vehemence. "Everything will indicate that he is! He would not be the first innocent person to suffer from circumstantial evidence! When you know all, when the details of the terrible crime are revealed to you, you will see them as I do, and think as I think!"

"My God! Is it possible?"

"Nerve yourself! steady yourself!" pleaded the girl, all the while exhibiting qualities of heart and mind rare indeed in one of her sex and years. "If anyone should come your very look would betray you."

"You are right!" muttered Slocum, making a desperate effort to pull himself together. "I'll be calm—or will try to be! But this is a frightful shock. I cannot believe what you imply."

"Wait till you know all."

Between the curtain and casing Keene saw George Slocum wipe from his brow the moisture that had gathered there in tiny drops; yet the dismay and agitation which at first had followed Sybil's mysterious words was now in part overcome.

He took her hands in both of his, an action

that brought a quick glow of affection to her cheeks and eyes, and asked hoarsely:

"Is the evidence indeed so conclusive?"

"Frightfully so!"

"Yet I cannot believe——"

"Neither believe nor disbelieve!" protested Sybil, with pleading eyes upturned to his. "Put it out of your mind, George! It is not for us to pass judgment. There is but one course for us to follow."

"And that?"

"We must keep the secret—rigidly! sacredly! eternally! He will not betray himself, George, never fear that! And, God helping us, we must not betray him! We must keep the secret!"

"And you will do this?" asked Slocum, with his quivering lips betraying the sudden swell of a tender emotion. "You will do this, Sybil?"

His fervor deepened the glow in her cheeks. She drew herself closer, with gaze meeting his, with eyes swimming in the light of a love surpassing reason even.

And under the roof of him who since childhood had sheltered her, while he lay still and cold in death, and justice sought in vain for his assassin, Sybil Howard gave this man her answer.

"Yes, I will do it, George!" she whispered, with passionate fervor. "I pledge myself to do it! The secret shall be safe with me! My lips shall be sealed forever!"

He looked down at her for a moment, then warmly pressed her hands.

"I must see you where there is no possibility of interruption," he said, suddenly. "I must know of what this evidence consists.



Take me to your room. Can't you take me to your room?"

"Yes, if you wish," assented Sybil, quickly. "Come."

And Detective Keene suffered them to depart unmolested.

What use to have confronted them then and there? Their word was as good as his in a court at law, and if already they had bound themselves by so awful a compact, they already would be equal to making a rigid denial.

They must be driven to the wall, decided Keene, in some more crafty way.

"She loves him! She loves him madly!" he said to himself, as he stole back to the hall and out of doors.

"And I am by no means sure in my own mind—to what this love may have led her!"

## CHAPTER V.

### WARY CONFIDENCES.

"You found no evidence outside the house, Shed?"

"None at all, Chief," replied Detective Keene.

The two were riding back to town in the early afternoon, their immediate examination of the circumstances having been completed, and the family left to the performance of the sad duties which follow such fatalities.

Further questioning of the several inmates of the house had served only to corroborate the statements made by young Ralph Barnard, which here need no rehearsal; and Keene had already imparted to Chief Inspector Watts his discoveries of the morning.

Yet this adept in criminal investigation had

made no decisive move ere leaving the Barnard house.

"The ground under the library windows?" he resumed, inquiringly.

"Is a gravel walk and offers nothing. Nor is there any evidence that the windows have been tampered with."

"You say you know this young man, Slocum?"

"Very well, indeed, Chief! We were quite good friends when in Harvard together."

"I think you had better take this case, then, and follow the clue you have struck," said the Chief, thoughtfully. "Since this Howard girl and Slocum do not suspect your observations, they will not likely be alarmed into any immediate action."

"I think you are right."

"During the afternoon we will examine more closely the charred documents I have brought away, and develop some definite line on which to proceed. Did Captain Mason leave in advance of us?"

Detective Keene shook his head.

"I think not," he replied. "Did you leave him free to act in this matter?"

"Oh, I shall not stand in his way!" smiled Chief Watts, indifferently. "Let him act, if he runs upon anything to warrant it."

And there was rather more implied in the Chief's smile than his words alone conveyed. For in every police department, as indeed in every phase of human life, there always exists a spirit of competition and rivalry which, while it may never be permitted to operate to a serious disadvantage, can never be entirely expunged. The subordinate is always eager to surpass the superior; and, in fact, perhaps



it is better so, since a laudable ambition to excel is a healthy stimulant.

Detective Keene laughed softly.

"He seemed to take quite an earnest interest, and I rather think he has formed a theory of his own," said he. "However, Chief, I'll bank upon your discernment and judgment against those of any man I happen to know."

To this Chief Inspector Watts returned no answer. His face had grown more grave. His lowered gaze was fixed upon a bundle laid on the seat opposite; as if, through its covering of brown paper, he would read with his searching blue eyes the true significance of its contents. He had taken up a train of thought which Detective Keene, even, would not venture to interrupt, and which was not voluntarily broken until their carriage drew up at the curbing before Headquarters, whence it had started nearly five hours before.

Two days later the funeral of Lawyer Barnard occurred, and the mystery involving his death seemed, in so far as a curious public knew, as dark and insoluble as ever.

Both Detective Keene and Captain Mason of the police were present at the funeral, but neither appeared to have any special object, nor to acquire any particular information. On leaving, the detective volunteered to take Mason along in his carriage as far as the district police office, and their intercourse during the brief ride was significant.

"Well, Detective Keene," said Captain Mason, abruptly, opening what proved to be somewhat of a verbal skirmish; "the victim of this tragedy is dead and will soon be buried; but the perpetrator of the crime is yet undis-

covered. On the level, Keene, what do you make of the case?"

If this burly Captain of police felt confident of pumping Keene, he was putting the saddle on the wrong horse, for the latter rarely gave himself away, as the saying goes.

And he is a shrewd man who, in competition, secures from others all the information he can, and in return imparts but little or none. It gives the recipient an advantage. And this was one of the clever characteristics of Detective Sheridan Keene.

"Well, on the level, Captain Mason—since you particularly desire it on the level!" he laughed oddly, yet meeting with genial frankness the other's steady scrutiny; "I am at present very much in the dark."

"Hasn't Chief Watts detailed you on the case?"

"Oh, yes! Yes, indeed!"

"I understood from him that he had. He has given me all his points in the affair."

"That so? Well, that's very like him," said Sheridan, dryly. "With Inspector Watts there is ever but one object in view—that of serving justice in the safest, surest and speediest way. What is the name of that young man I saw you talking with just before we came out—Slocum?"

"Yes, George Slocum," nodded Captain Mason, not discerning in Keene's innocent eye that a table had been turned. "He is the only son of Philip Slocum, the millionaire banker."

"Friend of the Barnard boys?"

"Very intimate, I understand."

"Grew up together, perhaps?"

"I think so. They live quite near, and the Barnard and Slocum estates adjoin."



"Is he married, this young Slocum?"

"No, he is not. I hear it rumored that he is soon to marry the daughter of Norton, the piano man. I believe the engagement was lately announced, yet Frank Barnard tells me he doubts if there is really anything in it."

"What sort of a man is he?"

"Slocum?"

"Yes."

"An honest young man, I think."

"Don't happen to know, do you, if at any time it has been thought likely that he would marry Miss Howard, who lives with the Barnards?" asked Detective Keene, indifferently.

Yet Captain Mason instantly pricked up his ears. He wondered what evidence Keene had discovered that prompted such a question.

"Not that I know of," he replied. "Why do you ask?"

"Oh, for no reason in particular!" said Detective Keene, carelessly. "I am carrying the case in mind, and naturally am looking on all sides for a motive for the crime. This Howard girl was the first to reach home the evening Barnard was shot," he added, significantly.

"But surely you don't imagine she shot him!" exclaimed Mason, involuntarily.

"I never imagine anything!" laughed the detective. "Either I know or I do not know! I sometimes suspect, but I never imagine. No, I don't suspect Sybil Howard—at least, not yet. Still," and his keen gray eyes came round to search those of the police captain, "there is no knowing what a jealous woman will do, and this Howard girl rather impresses me as being a Tartar. She is infernally handsome."

"I admit all that, but I don't believe that she had any hand in this affair!" said Captain Mason, curtly. "Who benefits by the Barnard will? In that, possibly, one might find a motive for the crime."

"His sons are joint heirs. We have looked that up, and them as well. Though either might have been an accessory before the crime, neither of them committed it. Nor am I inclined to suspect them at all."

"Well, whom do you suspect? Anybody?"

"To tell the truth, Captain Mason," said Keene, dubiously, "I can't say."

There was a gleam of doubt in Mason's eye, and he rejoined rather sharply:

"Didn't Chief Watts take away the revolver with which the crime was committed? Don't he know it belonged to Barnard himself?"

"Well, now that you speak of it, I believe he does."

"You know he does, Detective Keene! And Ralph Barnard informed me that the old man usually kept it in his chamber, but for some reason had brought it down to the library."

"That seems to indicate that he feared he might have occasion to use it, or at least require it in self-defense," suggested Keene.

"Yes, I have thought of that! It suggests, too, that he was expecting some visitor that evening, despite that he made no mention of the fact to his family, even on finding that he was to be left alone in the house!" exclaimed Mason, impulsively.

Keene ceased beating about the bush.

"Captain Mason," he said, abruptly, "you have formed a theory!"



"Ah, do you really think so?" cried Mason, bridling.

"Better—I know so!" smiled Keene in a quizzical way.

"And I presume you think you know even what it is!"

"Yes, I do, sir! You think Barnard had an appointment with some man that evening. Not a woman, sir, for he would not have required a revolver to have defended himself from a woman. The man already was a foe of Barnard, or the latter would not have anticipated an assault. You further think that the appointment was kept, and during the absence of the other persons from the house. You think that an altercation resulted between the two men, and that Barnard was assaulted and struck his assailant, and that the latter, in some way securing Barnard's revolver, shot him dead. This must have occurred so late in the evening that the criminal feared the immediate return of some of the family, for the ineffective way in which he fired the place betrayed his haste and excitement. He fled, closing the library door behind him, and leaving the room lighted. When the family returned and retired, it naturally was inferred that Barnard was still at work. Instead, he lay dead on the library floor, and the smoldering fire had burned out. Captain Mason, that is your theory!"

The latter laughed, but colored slightly.

"Keene, you have a long head!" he said, slowly. "I don't mind admitting it—that is my theory!"

"And the question to be answered is, Who was the visitor?"

"Precisely! Don't the lawyer's documents

or papers suggest any person with whom he may have had business that evening?"

Detective Keene shook his head.

"They suggest many persons," he replied. "Unfortunately, many of the documents are considerably burned. In so far as I can determine from the charred remains, they consist largely of deeds, writs, with four or five mortgages, and one was evidently a will. The latter, however, is so nearly destroyed that I cannot determine even whose will it was. Only a small segment of it is left at all, but by part of a line here and there it appears to involve a considerable property."

"Is the date intact?"

"Not even the date. By the faded paper, however, it appears to be an old one."

"The signatures of the witnesses?"

"Gone in smoke! Nothing is left by which it can be positively identified."

"Could it not be traced at the probate court?"

"I fear not. Here we are at your station."

"Will you come in?"

"No, I thank you. I'll let the cab take me back to Headquarters. Good-day!"

"Good-day!"

And Captain Mason nodded farewell rather grimly.

## CHAPTER VI.

### A CHASE IN THE DARK.

After the crime comes the pursuit—often that long, tedious and frequently unavailing search made by these patient and persistent bloodhounds of the law, in an effort to avenge the dead and punish the transgressor.

An eye for an eye!

A tooth for a tooth!



A life for a life!

This is the law!

In the semi-darkness of the early evening, two days subsequent to the burial of Joseph Barnard, a solitary man stole into the great park surrounding the dead man's dwelling and cautiously approached it from one side.

The man was Detective Keene.

His purpose was to secure, unbeknown to others of the house, a second interview with Sybil Howard.

The night was wholly clear. Fleeting clouds here and there obscured the stars, and a dismal wind sighed through the gloomy trees.

Doubtful how he might successfully attract Sybil from the house, providing he found her at home, Detective Keene skirted the damp lawn until opposite the dining-room, which was lighted, and the side door.

From the latter, even while he stood watching and undecided, there suddenly emerged the figure of the girl he was seeking. But the manner of her egress, the care with which she softly closed the door, the dark garment in which she was clad, and the silent haste with which she stole away, at once indicated that she was departing on some definite and secret mission.

"So, so! my darling and defiant beauty!" said the detective to himself. "This also looks a bit suspicious; I will see what it portends, since our little interview can wait!"

And he prepared to cautiously follow her.

It did not prove an easy task, despite his experience as a shadow, for Sybil Howard, instead of turning to the street, shaped a course through the park and the woodland beyond. In the darkness this added to the

difficulty, requiring the detective to maintain a close pursuit, and augmenting the danger of discovery by the rustle of leaves and breaking twigs.

It was a rough walk, and lonely; one no woman would have chosen save to avoid observation, and under stringent circumstances and serious mental excitement.

That Sybil Howard was thus actuated, Keene speedily decided, was betrayed in her walk, her nervous haste, and her manifest determination.

Before she had reached her destination the detective had guessed it.

"She is going to see George Slocum!" was his mental comment.

But in this he was wrong, despite that presently the lights in the banker's great wooden mansion came into view through the trees.

That Sybil Howard was expected was also betrayed in his movements. She at once approached the side door of the house, which was almost immediately opened for her; not by George Slocum—but by the banker himself!

By the light in the narrow entry Keene caught a glimpse of his tall, slight figure and gray head; and, briefly watching, presently he saw Sybil's shadow on the curtain of one of the end rooms.

"She has called to see the father—not the son!" he muttered, perplexed for the moment.

Then, like a blinding flash, there recurred to his mind the interview he had overheard in the Barnard parlors.

"It was to Philip Slocum the girl referred!" he decided, thrilled through every nerve by the import of the discovery. "And



that explains George Slocum's agitation! By Heaven! I must overhear this interview!"

It was dark outside. Only the faint glow from the curtained window broke the gloom of the scene. Moving quickly, Keene silently approached the room.

The window was down at the bottom, but the upper half had been slightly lowered for ventilation.

Whipping out his knife, the detective cautiously inserted the blade under the lower sash, and by a hair's breadth at a time silently raised it till he could hear the voices from within.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### THE SCENE WITHIN.

The man whom Sybil Howard confronted in the privacy of his own library was about fifty years of age, and in appearance a typical American gentleman.

Nor did appearances much belie him. Philip Slocum had inherited his father's great fortune some twenty years before, and could now draw his check for a million. His place on the Charles was less than a quarter mile from that of his late legal adviser, Joseph Barnard, who had been the attorney of his father before him.

He looked all that he was. His hands were fair and delicate, and he was very scrupulously dressed. His countenance was pale and grave, with an expression of indefinable sadness, as if something in the past had left a shadow on the man.

He had taken one of his luxurious easy chairs, and sat with his gaze fixed upon the pale face of his visitor, who, as if scarce able to contain herself, stood with one arm resting

on the broad marble mantel, her garment thrown back from her shapely shoulders, and her magnificent features set in an expression of icy determination.

"I cannot conceive, Sybil, why you should have written me as you did," the banker said, doubtfully, in rather tremulous tones.

"I shall presently tell you why," Sybil answered, with a firmness born of desperate resolution. "You have made sure that we are alone and unheard?"

"Perfectly so! That was your instruction."

"I demand it for your sake, less than for my own. I first am going to tell you, Mr. Slocum, why I am here."

"Do so, please!"

"It is because I want your influence to accomplish a certain object; your aid, that I may realize a hope so dear to my heart that I would sacrifice all but life to attain it. If I can secure your influence willingly it may save further discussion between us," she concluded, curtly.

"What is this hope?"

"That of becoming the wife of your son, George Slocum, sir!"

The face of the banker changed slightly, becoming a trifle more pale, but he responded quietly:

"I think I have heard your late uncle say something of this. In fact, he has tried to prevail upon me to urge George into a marriage with you. I can guess why your heart is so set upon it!"

A covert sneer in the man's tone sent a momentary flush like that of shameful agony to the girl's white face, as if his doubt of the



genuineness of her love was a wrong greater than she could bear.

"It is not with any mercenary motive, Mr. Philip Slocum!" she replied, with passionate fervor, her splendid eyes aglow. "No, sir, never that! never that! It is alone because I love him, more dearly than life; so dearly even that I sacrifice that womanly reserve which should have kept me from such a step as this! I have grown up with him, sir, and I know him for what he is—all that is manly and noble and grand. If he stood in the street a pauper, I would marry him for love alone! Have you never heard that a woman can love so madly that at whatever cost she will not suffer the perverting of her hope?"

"I now can imagine such a case!" said the banker, dryly. "And what leads you to appeal to me at just this time?"

"Because, sir, at just this time it is rumored that George thinks of marrying another."

"And you wish me to interpose in your behalf?" frowned the banker.

"Yes!"

"In a word, you wish me to attempt coercion, if necessary?"

"If necessary—yes!"

"And if I refuse even to consider such a proposition?"

"You will not refuse!"

"But I do—positively!"

"You will reconsider it!"

"I shall not!"

"Is that final?"

"It is final!"

The girl, in whose cheeks not a vestige of color was remaining, drew a deep breath and dropped the dark wrap she wore entirely from her shoulders.

"Then you drive me to a worse side of this discussion," she said curtly, with a nervous twitching of her gray lips. "I have not come here to ask this as a favor only!"

The banker half started from his chair.

"For what, then?" he demanded, hoarsely, with a betrayal of rising apprehension. "What do you mean, Sybil Howard? Do you dare threaten me?"

"My love dares anything?" cried Sybil, with a sort of solemn fervor. "Are you prepared, Mr. Slocum, to quietly hear what I have to say?"

That she held some power over this man by which she awed and subdued him, or, at least, that he believed her possessed of such a power, there could be no doubt. For he sat trembling in every fiber of his slight figure, his eyes at times shrinking from those of Sybil, and with his pallid features drawn as if by the very agony of secret dread and doubt.

"I will hear you—yes!" he faltered, huskily. "But I——"

"Sir, there will be no buts, after you have heard!"

She came nearer to him now, with an ominous drooping of her arching brows, and said, slowly, with impressive significance:

"So far as the world knows, Mr. Slocum, you and my late uncle were very good friends—weren't you?"

"So far as the world knows—yes!" bitterly answered the banker with a visible shudder.

"Oh, but he was a friend to you, despite that you intimate the contrary!" the girl cried, pointedly, with an upward toss of her shapely head.



"He was that when your father died, sir!" she went on. "He held the will executed by your father, by which you, sir, were disinherited if you married the girl who is now your wife. Did he expose that you were already married to her, and that your protest to the contrary, made at your father's death-bed, was a perjury? Oh, no; not he! Nor after his death did he produce the will which would have sent you head over heels by the board, and have bequeathed to charity all of your father's fortune."

Philip Slocum sat wringing his bloodless hands, but did not answer.

"No, he did nothing of the kind, Mr. Slocum!" Sybil Howard steadily continued. "Instead, my late uncle stood by you like a brother! He let it appear that your father had died intestate. He had himself appointed administrator of the estate. And he threw the entire property into the hands of your father's only child—into your hands, Mr. Philip Slocum, like the stanch friend he truly was! Were he to have produced that will, even at this late date, sir, it would have made you—a pauper!"

On the banker's ghastly face there had settled a frown of intense and virulent bitterness.

"Your knave of an uncle has been well repaid through all these past years!" he replied, in tones he scarce could govern. "He has made me a puppet under his evil thumb! I have yielded to his every demand. I have made him rich, as he claimed to have made me!"

"And did he not?"

"No! no! eternally no!" cried Slocum with

passionate fervency. "For God in heaven knows that the will itself was an outrage, the impulsive deed of a father blinded by his own false pride and passions! And your designing uncle, with a view to his own knavish welfare, upheld my father in this injustice, only to prove traitor to it after my father's death. In the sight of God, my father's fortune rightfully belonged to me, though I married whom I would! As for you, Sybil Howard, you have been playing the spy!"

The girl did not resent his suppressed anger. There was something pathetic even in her inflexible firmness. She fell back a step, to stand with her jeweled hand resting on the table, and her superb figure erect and rigid.

"Not precisely a spy!" she retorted proudly. "But I did hear by accident your interview with my uncle the night before he was murdered. It was then only that I discovered the secret which so long has bound you two."

"Did you hear all?"

"Enough to serve my present purpose, sir!" she said firmly. "My uncle demanded the same favor I have asked. You refused. He insisted. He threatened to produce the will unless you complied. You begged for one day in which to consider, and you required that the will should be brought from the city, that you again might see it. He assented to these provisions, and you were to call again the following night—that on which he was murdered! He little dreamed the desperate and appalling purpose you carried in mind!"

Like a man struck a sudden blow, the banker sprang from his seat.



"Merciful God!" he cried, aghast. "You don't imply that I killed Joseph Barnard!"

The girl stood as motionless and white as a figure of marble.

"Were you not with him on the night of the crime?"

"Yes, I was! But I——"

"Wait! There is no need to prolong this painful scene! You alone were with my uncle that evening. I saw you at eleven o'clock, when you left the house. I was near the edge of the park, and saw you rush homeward by the way of the woods. Why did you not go by the street? Did you fear observation? Why have you not come forward and admitted yourself to be the man who visited my uncle that night? Shall I tell you why? Shall——"

"Sybil!"

"There is no need! The evidence speaks for itself! Your own face condemns you!" she interrupted sternly, and stooping, she caught up her garment from the floor.

"You're in the wrong! You——"

With a gesture she checked him, as she swung round from the door to which she had turned.

"I am not in the wrong!" she cried forcibly, with eyes glowing with the fire of a triumph she made no effort to conceal. "If I am wrong—I leave you to make public the incriminating facts you have concealed, even while you have known the officers of the law to be seeking for the visitor of that fatal night!"

Shaken from head to foot, the banker covered his ghastly face with his hands, as if the situation in which he was involved was too terrible for contemplation even.

The girl stood for a moment longer.

"You will reconsider the favor I have asked!" she concluded, pointedly. "You will do it for me as you did it for my uncle! For the power that was his now is mine! And a greater power, even—since life itself is now in the balance!"

"Oh, my God!"

"I shall await your answer over tomorrow! And now I bid you good-night, sir!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

POLICE CAPTAIN MASON.

That the interview was ended, that this girl had done and dared so much, and sacrificed even girlish reserve and decorum in the blindness of a love that was cherished even as life—that she was now about to depart, there could be no doubt.

And Detective Sheridan Keene instantly realized that his position was decidedly too hazardous to maintain.

Moving quickly and quietly he slipped around a corner of the house and ran full into the arms of a man who had been watching and listening at a window opposite his own.

It so startled Keene as well nigh to carry him off his feet. He recoiled with a gasp and stare, and in the faint glow from the curtained window he now beheld, motionless as a statue of bronze, the burly figure of the head of the local police, Captain Elroy Mason!

"Good heavens, Mason——"

"Silence!" hissed the latter, and without more ado he seized Keene by the arm and drew him hurriedly away.



Not until they were well away from the house, in fact had gained the open street, was the silence between them broken. Then Captain Mason said deeply, in accents of grim triumph:

"Well, Detective Keene, the game is now run down!"

Sheridan Keene was rather nonplussed for the moment, and had quietly yielded to the officer's interference.

"How the dickens, Mason," he demanded, "did you surmise the fact that Banker Slocum might be involved in this affair?"

Captain Mason laughed grimly, in a half-triumphant way.

"By the charred segment of the will of which you told me," he dryly admitted. "It appeared to involve so much property, and Barnard having been the elder Slocum's legal adviser, and, their estates adjoining, I suspected it might point there. So I slipped out here to-night merely to have an informal chat with the banker—but I don't find it necessary!"

"Then you think he killed Barnard?"

"No, I do not."

"Ah!" was all the detective said.

"I think he told the truth," resumed the Police Captain; "I think he left Joe Barnard alive when he departed that night."

"But who, then?"

"Humph! You seem to have great faith in this girl, Sybil Howard! She was the first to return home that night, and immediately after Slocum departed. I think she found her uncle had been unable to coerce the banker."

"And then?"

"She shot him, I think, in order to personally have that power of which she has just boasted, and to cast suspicion of the crime upon Slocum. It was the impulsive deed of a woman crazed by love."

Sheridan did not argue the point. He was

far from convinced that this girl, with all her beauty, education and refinement, could have murdered the man who had been a father to her since childhood.

"And what do you propose doing about it, Captain Mason?" he asked, with curious dryness.

"Humph! it's plain enough what should be done!" was the curt reply. "The girl should be arrested on a warrant charging her with the crime. Chief Watts left me to act in the matter, and I shall do so!"

A curious smile had stolen over Detective Keene's mobile face.

"Do you think the way is now clear to sustaining the allegation?" he asked, quietly.

"I think it is clear to forcing her to a full confession," Captain Mason answered, decidedly. "She, not being cognizant of the information we possess, it will be an easy matter to break her down."

"And her arrest?"

"Can be made to-morrow morning! If Watts wants it deferred he can telephone me!"

"So he can! I'd overlooked that!" drawled Keene, oddly.

"Ah, here comes an in-bound car! I think I'll take it!" he added shortly.

"Good-night, then!" cried Captain Mason, hurriedly.

"Good-night!" came back the detective's cheery answer.

## CHAPTER IX.

### DETECTIVE KEENE.

Detective Keene did not remain long on the car. He rode for a hundred yards or thereabouts, sufficiently far to feel sure of evading Captain Mason's observation, then sprang off and hastened through a cross street, and shaped a course that would bring him back to the Slocum residence.

His fine, earnest face now wore a differ-



ent expression, and an ugly determination fired his thoughtful blue eyes. Yet his mind was not upon Captain Mason and his suspicion, nor upon the mystery of the case itself, even; he was thinking of the recent utterances of Sybil Howard, of this girl's magnificent beauty, and of the fate possibly awaiting her.

To him there was an irresistible pathos in the romance of her life, the distressful fear and hopelessness with which she had loved so dearly. He could not but admire her resolution and courage, despite that they had been so ill-directed in these last hours.

Yet he would not believe her guilty of the crime. He could not think, even in the light of all the evidence against her, that she had slain Joseph Barnard that fateful night, and then set fire to the will that might have ruined the father of him she so passionately loved, and now conspired to gain.

It was after nine o'clock when Sheridan Keene again approached the banker's residence. On this occasion he rang the bell at the front door, and asked for the son, George Slocum. Fortunately, he found the young man at home, and they met in the reception-room, the door of which the detective coolly closed.

"See here, George!" he exclaimed, frankly, when greetings had been passed; "you and I were good friends in college, and I think you had a tolerably high opinion of my loyalty as a friend. I wish to ask you a few questions, George, and for you to answer them confidentially!"

"To what do they relate?" asked Slocum, in grave surprise.

"They may have a bearing on the murder of Joseph Barnard," said Keene, frankly. "But I will state, here and now, George, that I am not aiming to do you or yours any harm. Rather the contrary!"

"I believe you, Shed! You may ask the

questions, and I will answer them if I think best."

"Very good! First, then, have you any idea of marrying?"

"Well, in a vague way I have been thinking of it. Still I have said nothing about it as yet, not even to the girl I have in mind."

"Who is the girl you have in mind?"

George Slocum laughed and colored.

"Well, since you appear so desirous of knowing, her name is Sybil Howard!"

Keene caught his breath with a gasp and threw both hands above his head.

"Oh, my God! I'm so glad!" he cried, with an involuntary betrayal of emotion.

"What do you mean?" demanded Slocum, suspiciously.

"Don't ask me! At least, not now! Tell me, rather, what there is in the rumor that you were about to marry one Norton girl?"

"Humph! Nothing at all but idle gossip!"

"Have you heard it before now?"

"Yes, I have," nodded Slocum, frowning slightly. "But I am not the man to notice gossip and rumors. I've not bothered even to deny the report."

"Will you answer me one more question, Slocum?" demanded Keene, earnestly, and with suspiciously glistening eyes. "I know you will answer it truthfully!"

"You may ask it."

"What is your opinion of the character of Sybil Howard?"

George Slocum drew himself up with genuine and lofty pride, looking the detective squarely in the eye.

"Sybil Howard!" he said, feelingly. "Why, I have known her since childhood! She is as good, grand and lovable a girl as ever stood in shoes. I have loved her since boyhood, and she me! If I were not as sure of her love as I am, I should have been on my knees to her long ago! But she knows well enough that I love her!"



Keene turned away with breast heaving and walked to the window.

"How blind they have been!" thought he. Presently he turned back and said:

"That's all, George, and many thanks! Now I wish you to bring me into friendly touch with your father. Will you do it?"

"Surely, if you wish it."

This was easily and readily accomplished, and a few minutes later the detective was seated alone with the banker, in the very room in which Sybil Howard had been received less than an hour before.

Philip Slocum's face was pale and haggard, that of a man whose burden of sorrow and anxiety was becoming greater than man can bear. It moved a feeling of pity in the detective, for Slocum's public record was above reproach.

Keene's eyes wore a look not inviting equivocation, however, and his voice carried a ring of semi-subdued austerity not wisely to be ignored.

"I noticed that your son, in presenting me to you, Mr. Slocum," he said, "did not prepare you for this interview by informing you of my vocation."

"Your vocation, Mr. Keene?" the banker murmured, tremulously. "No, he did not."

"I am a detective, sir."

"A detective!"

Slocum echoed the word with a convulsive twitching of his slender hands, but otherwise maintained his outward calmness.

"Yes, a detective," said Keene, shortly. "But I am here rather as a friend than a foe. I want you to give me some information, which I hope may redound to your advantage. Be that as it may, a confession of the truth must be had. Mr. Slocum, what do you know about the killing of Mr. Barnard?"

The banker drew a long breath, then seemed to nerve himself to take the position Keene had invited and appeared prepared to compel.

"I know absolutely nothing about it!" he declared, huskily, yet with firmness.

"Haven't you been under the coercion of Barnard in a way? Give me the whole truth, sir!"

"I admit that I have."

"Tell me how?"

"In early life I secretly married a good and beautiful girl, my present wife. My father opposed this. To coerce me to his whim, he made a will disinheriting me and giving his property to charity, in event of my marriage to this girl. Barnard, who was my father's attorney, and an unprincipled and crafty scamp, advised the making of this will, and it was intrusted to his care and keeping."

"Go on, sir."

"When my father lay dying, Barnard and I were alone with him. My father asked me if I was still resolved to marry the girl. I already was married to her, sir; but I denied the fact, and promised to yield to his wish. It was the lie of a young man who believed he had a right to marry whom his heart cherished, and a right to inherit what justly should become his. It seemed to satisfy my father. He turned to Barnard, whom he implicitly trusted, and commanded him to destroy the will, which the lawyer still had in keeping."

"And which Barnard did not do?"

"Far from it, sir! Since I was already married to the girl, the lawyer had me helplessly in his power. He suppressed the will, however, and threw the entire estate into my hands by lineal descent."

"And since has bled and coerced you to his liking?"

"Alas, yes!" groaned the banker. "The half could not be told! Despite his crafty pretensions, Barnard was a knave of the shrewdest kind."

"Are you aware, Mr. Slocum, that that will has been destroyed by fire and now can never be executed?"



"Yes, I am aware of it."

"When did you learn that fact?"

"On the day of Barnard's death. I heard that a will had been found burned, and I knew well to what will it referred."

"How did you know?"

The banker hesitated.

The detective leaned forward and said sternly:

"Tell me! I want the whole truth! You were with Barnard on the night of his murder!"

"My God!" gasped Slocum, pale as marble. "How do you know that?"

"Because," said Keene, bluntly; "I overheard your interview with Sybil Howard in this room a brief hour ago!"

Slocum fell back in his chair like a man suddenly stricken with death.

"Heaven help me, I am lost! I am lost!" he muttered, brokenly, as if this straw were indeed the last. "I confess it! I can sustain this soul-sickening conflict no longer! My one blind lie has pursued me relentlessly for more than twenty years, and even to this! I confess that I was with him! I confess it, sir! But"—and now he started up with sudden, passionate fervor—"as God hears me, Mr. Keene, I did not harm Joseph Barnard!"

Detective Keene sat apparently unmoved by this piteous declaration.

"Why have you not come forward, Mr. Slocum, and stated that you were Barnard's visitor that night?" he demanded, gravely.

"Because I believed my visit was not known; and I feared that, if it were, the circumstantial evidence, tending to incriminate me in his death, might be greater than I could refute. I heard that the will was destroyed, and I have relied upon escaping suspicion. Alas! it was not to be! Another, a woman, now, has risen phoenix-like out of the dead ashes of my own ignobility!"

Looking at this subdued and broken man,

whose proud record in the eyes of the world had been as clear and bright as the light of midday, Sheridan Keene found it as hard to believe him guilty of the murder as even Sybil Howard.

But the one and indisputable fact persistently remained—some person had killed Joseph Barnard!

Impelled to turn his inquiries upon a new line, Keene leaned forward and said sharply:

"Attend to me, Mr. Slocum! We will assume that you did not kill Barnard! At what time, then, did you leave his house?"

The banker pulled himself together, and his eyes brightened.

"Just before eleven o'clock," he rejoined readily.

"How long had you been with him?"

"About two hours."

"Discussing the steps he wished you to take in order to influence your son to marry his niece?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you consent to attempt this?"

"I agreed to consult George, and to advise him to marry Sybil."

Keene seized with avidity upon this point. If the banker spoke the truth, he at that time would have had no special occasion for killing the knavish lawyer.

"When you left the house, Mr. Slocum," continued Keene, "you returned home by the way of the woods. Why so?"

"Because it is the shorter way! For that reason only!"

"Did you see Sybil Howard?"

"I did not."

"She was returning home from a concert in company with your son. How far is it from the edge of the woods, where they both observed you, to the Barnard house?"

"About three hundred yards, I should say."

Keene sized up the situation with a single thought. If the banker had left Barnard



alive, and Sybil also was innocent, the fatality must necessarily have occurred within the few minutes occupied by George and Sybil in approaching the house after the banker's departure. Otherwise the report of the revolver must have been heard.

"See here, Mr. Slocum!" exclaimed Keene, with augmented earnestness; "did you part in an ordinary way with Barnard?"

"I think so. What do you mean?"

"What was he doing when you rose to go?"

"He was filling his pipe."

"Filling his pipe!" echoed the detective, with a sudden startled look leaping to his eyes. "Did he walk to the door with you?"

"He did; yes."

"Had you had any serious altercation with him?"

"Nothing violent, sir, on my word!"

"Yet, Mr. Slocum," cried Keene, sternly; "he had brought his revolver down to the library."

"I know that, sir. He perhaps feared I might become violent, in my opposition with his coercion; but I never stoop to personal violence, sir. I knew that he had his revolver there, moreover, for I saw it."

"You saw it?"

"Yes, sir, I did, despite that he had aimed to conceal it, and yet have it handy. It was under some of the loose papers which lay upon the leaf of the table at his elbow."

Detective Keene started slightly, caught himself as quickly, and then abruptly rose to his feet.

"I think that is all, Mr. Slocum," he said, quietly; yet the look on his handsome face was one that should have made his hearer wonder. "Yes, I think that is all!"

"Have you nothing——"

"Nothing to impart to you to-night, sir!" interposed Keene, taking his hat. "Oh, by the way!"

He turned back from the door, which he had already partly opened; and, approaching Philip Slocum, laid his hand upon the shoulder of the sorrow-stricken man.

"Not a word about Sybil Howard and her visit here to-night, nor about yourself, nor about this crime!" he said, with stern and startling significance. "Not a word—till you have heard from me again!"

## CHAPTER X.

### A STRANGE FATALITY.

It was late in the evening when Detective Keene arrived in town, and he did not report at headquarters. He felt, in fact, that there was really no occasion for it, despite that his abrupt termination of the interview with Philip Slocum, and his immediate departure from the banker's residence, would seem to indicate something out of the ordinary.

It was nearly noon the following day, moreover, before he made his official report to Chief Inspector Watts, the latter having been called from his office by a consultation in State street.

Yet Detective Keene's report, and the private conference which ensued between him and Chief Watts, although comparatively brief, were followed by speedy and startling results.

Both left Headquarters shortly after noon, and together took a carriage for the suburbs.

"Riverlawn Park! House of the late Lawyer Barnard!" were the directions which Chief Watts gave to the cabman.

"Have you heard from Captain Mason this morning?" asked Keene, as they rode away.

"Not personally," replied the Chief Inspector. "Garrett tells me I was called up by him over the telephone about ten o'clock, but he left no definite message. I just tried to communicate with him, but his sergeant at the station told me he was out."



"Do you know, Chief, I really think he means to arrest Sybil Howard."

Chief Inspector Watts smiled oddly.

"Let him if he likes," he rejoined, quietly. "Perhaps he will ultimately decide that there is nothing in hasty action."

"It was one o'clock when they arrived at Riverlawn Park, and a closed carriage was drawn up at the entrance to the Barnard driveway.

Chief Watts shot a swift glance at the cabman, who was seated on his box, and demanded quietly:

"Driver, who is your passenger?"

"What are you after wanting to know for?" was the curt rejoinder.

"Answer my question, driver, or you'll find yourself without a license!"

The Chief's grave voice had undergone no change, but something in his cold blue eyes suddenly brought the cabman to his senses.

"Sure, sir!" he exclaimed, touching his hat, "it's Captain Mason, of the police."

Without a word, Chief Inspector Watts led Keene up the driveway to the house. The screen door only was closed, and he did not pause to ring. He strode unceremoniously into the hall, and turned to the parlor, from which voices were heard.

There in the warm glow of midday sunshine, yet pale and tremulous herself, and with tears of distress in her splendid eyes, stood Sybil Howard. And confronting her, imposing in blue and brass, was the burly figure of the Captain of the Police.

Only these words, ere he entered, reached Detective Keene's ears:

"There is no alternative, Miss Howard! You are under arrest and must go with me!"

Then Captain Mason heard the steps in the hall, and drew back in blank amazement when Chief Inspector Watts came over the threshold.

"Good-morning, Captain!" said the Chief in an indescribably quiet way. "Sorry that I didn't get you by wire this morning. But it's just as well—now!"

Sybil had swung round when Detective Keene entered, and one glance of passionate scorn flashed from her flooded eyes.

"Do I owe this outrageous arrest to you, sir?" she demanded, with insuperable scorn.

"Well, hardly!" said Keene dryly, with a toss of his head.

"I think, Captain Mason," here Chief Inspector Watts interposed, half-aside; "that we had better defer this arrest for a time. I should have suggested it earlier, could I have reached you. We have run out here to have one more look at the library. Come along with us, Captain."

"Why, surely, Chief!" nodded Mason, who had scarce recovered from his surprise. "I really hope——"

"Oh, there's no harm done! Come this way."

And, while a curious smile stole over Keene's face, at the bland suavity of his superior, Chief Watts led the way through the hall and into the room in which the late Joseph Barnard had met his untimely death.

The room had been put in order, but the general furnishings were as previously described.

Without delay, Chief Watts knelt upon the floor and briefly examined the under portion of the square mahogany table, which the lawyer had used for a desk.

"We are right, Detective Keene!" he presently exclaimed, rising to his feet. "The bar is very loose, and in match marks under the leaf is written one of Barnard's careless habits!"

"Good heavens!" muttered Captain Mason, with a sort of nonplussed look on his face. "What does this mean, Chief Watts? You are right in what?"



"Simply this," said Chief Inspector Watts in his quiet way, and there was an irrepressible twinkle in the eyes meeting Mason's; "Barnard bade Slocum good-night at the door. He came back here filling his pipe, and closed this library door behind him."

"Well?"

"He took a match from the box on the table to light his pipe. The leaf of the table was raised. His revolver lay upon it, under the loose papers. A little excited, perhaps, after his scene with Slocum, with considerable force he struck the match on the under side of the table leaf, and by accident threw the bar which upheld the leaf. The blow bruised his hand and broke his ring. The leaf dropped instantly, revolver, papers and all. Barnard stooped to catch them. The weapon struck the floor and exploded, and the ball found the heart of the stooping man. The lighted match he held fired the fallen papers.

"And there, Captain Mason, you have the true cause of Joseph Barnard's death!"

For all of a minute Captain Elroy Mason stood motionless and silent, his face a picture as if chagrin had somewhere a place in his subdued feelings.

Then Chief Inspector Watts burst out laughing.

"Explain it to him further, Detective Keene!" he said, quietly. "I have a word to say to another."

And while Sheridan Keene, flushed with genuine pleasure, disclosed to Mason how his recent interview with Philip Slocum had suggested the true cause of the accident which had befallen the designing lawyer, the Chief Inspector returned to the parlor and had a brief but earnest talk with Sybil Howard. Yet it was gentle and kindly in the superlative degree.

When Detective Keene and his companion came out through the hall the girl was at

the threshold of the parlor door, and Chief Watts was bidding her adieu.

She was crying, and her lips were quivering, but on her splendid face there had come a light that never shone on land or sea.

"Oh, Mr. Watts! Mr. Watts!" she was saying, sobbingly, "you have made me so happy! You will have made us all so happy! How—oh, sir! how am I to thank you?"

Chief Inspector Watts looked down at her, with something like a very tender smile in his expressive eyes.

"Me? Thank me?" he rejoined, half-jokingly. "Don't do it, Miss Howard! Instead—thank Detective Keene!"

She turned and saw, nearly beside her, the man to whom she had felt she owed all the ills that had befallen her, and on whom she so lately had bestowed so much of bitterness and scorn.

A quick flush mantled her cheeks.

Then, impulsively, with breast heaving and tears flooding her eyes anew, she eagerly gave Sheridan Keene both her hands.

[THE END.]

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